

Message Text

PAGE 01 PANAMA 04470 272056Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8258

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PANCANAL

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GUATEMALA FOR ROCAP

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ECON, PN

SUBJECT: PRIVATE SECTOR SPOKESMEN: A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

1. SUMMARY: SIGNIFICANT CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED WITHIN THE LAST WEEK IN THE LEADERSHIP OF PANAMA'S PRINCIPAL BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS, WITH THE ELECTION OF NEW PRESIDENTS FOR APEDE AND CONEP, BOTH OF WHOM APPEAR LESS CONTROVERSIAL THAN THEIR PREDECESSORS, AND WITH THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT ELECT (STILL-EXILED) DOMINGUEZ OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. END SUMMARY

2. LIC. GUSTAVO A. PEREZ, MANAGER OF A LOCAL BRANCH OF BANCO DE COLOMBIA, WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS EXECUTIVES (APEDE) FOR THE FOLLOWING TWELVE-MONTH PERIOD ON JUNE 22. PEREZ, HEADING AN UNOPPOSED SLATE OF NOMINEES, THUS REPLACES LIC. CARLOS ERNESTO GONZALEZ DE LA LASTRA, WHO MADE APEDE THE FOCAL POINT OF PRIVATE SECTOR OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS OF LAST JAN-
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 04470 272056Z

UARY AND WHO HAS SINCE BECOME ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THE POLITICALLY-ORIENTED SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (PANANA 3957).

3. PEREZ IS THOUGHT TO BE CONSIDERABLY LESS INCLINED TO LEAD THE ORGANIZATION INTO CONFRONTATION WITH GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. SOON AFTER THE GOP BOYCOTT OF THE APEDE ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN MAY (PANAMA 3829), THERE APPEARED INCREASING SIGNS THAT A MAJORITY OF THE MEMBERSHIP WISHED TO MOVE AWAY FROM SUCH CONFRONTATION AND INSTEAD MEND FENCES. ALSO SOME APEDE MEMBERS BELIEVE THEY HAVE INFORMAL ASSURANCES FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS THAT ONCE GONZALEZ IS REMOVED FROM OFFICE APEDE WILL BE PERMITTED TO REOCCUPY ITS OFFICES WHICH HAVE BEEN UNDER GUARD SINCE JANUARY. ONE CLOSE FRIEND OF GONZALEZ HAS EXPRESSED FEAR THAT GONZALEZ WILL BECOME A PRIME CANDIDATE FOR EXPULSION OR WORSE ONCE THE PROTECTIVE MANTLE OF HIS APEDE POSITION IS REMOVED.

4. THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE (CONEP), THE CONFEDERATION OF PANAMANIAN PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS, ELECTED ING. FRANCISCO J. MORALES PRESIDENT FOR THE PERIOD JULY-DECEMBER ON JUNE 17. MORALES, CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMANIAN CONSTRUCTION CHAMBER (CAPAC), REPLACES ING. JUAN JOSE AMADO III, WHO ACTED AS PRIVATE SECTOR SPOKESMAN IN DISCUSSIONS LEADING TO THE "TRUCE" IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE JANUARY CONFRONTATION AND WHO HAS ALSO HAD A LEADING ROLE IN SUBSEQUENT EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR DIALOGUE. HIS TERM AS PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA SYNDICATE OF INDUSTRIALISTS (SIP) EXPIRES IN AUGUST.

5. MORALES, A RESPECTED CIVIL ENGINEER OF REGIONAL REPUTATION, IS ALSO EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN A SOMEWHAT LOWER PROFILE IN HIS NEW POSITION THAN SOME OF HIS RECENT PREDECESSORS. AMADO IS ACCUSED BY SOME BUSINESSMEN OF CAMPAIGNING SO BLATANTLY FOR APPOINTMENT TO A HIGH GOVERNMENTAL POSITION THAT HE HAS LOST HIS EFFECTIVENESS AS A CREDIBLE SPOKESMAN FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

6. IN A SURPRISE MOVE, PANAMA CITY'S CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 18 THE RESIGNATION OF "PRESIDENT ELECT" ANTONIO DOMINGUEZ AND THE GRANTING OF FULL TITLE TO THE OFFICE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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PAGE 03 PANAMA 04470 272056Z

TO CURRENT "ACTING PRESIDENT" JOSE CHIRINO.

7. WHILE CHIRINO'S LEADERSHIP OF THE CHAMBER SINCE JANUARY HAS BEEN MARKED BY A STEADY DON'T-ROCK-THE-BOAT ATTITUDE, DOMINGUEZ' ELECTION TO THIS OFFICE A SCANT TWO DAYS FOLLOWING HIS EXILE BY THE GOP HAS REMAINED A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE GOP AND OF DIFFICULTY IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE CHAMBER. NEVERTHELESS, DOMINGUEZ HAS FIGURED IN LOCAL SPECULATION AS THE INDIVIDUAL AMONG THOSE STILL IN EXILE MOST LIKELY TO BE PERMITTED SOON TO RETURN. WHETHER A CONDITION FOR THAT RETURN WAS HIS RESIGNATION FROM THIS OFFICE MAY SOON BECOME APPARENT.

8. THE MOVEMENT WITHIN APEDE AND THE CHAMBER TOWARD
REMOVAL OF POSSIBLE IMPEDIMENTS TO COMMUNICATION WITH THE GOP MAY
WELL HAVE PROMPTED BY REALIZATION THAT IMPLEMENTATION
OF RECOVERY FROM PANAMA'S CONTINUING ECONOMIC SLUMP WILL
REQUIRE CONSIDERABLY MORE UNDERSTANDING AND COLLABORATION THAN
HAS RECENTLY BEEN APPARENT.
GONZALEZ

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